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ABSTRACT

This paper is the text of a speech given by the president of "Students for Education," a students' organization at Rutgers-The State University at Camden (New Jersey), describing her experiences organizing and leading the group. She describes the organization's first year when it was a grassroots organization with the goal of becoming an officially recognized student group. Activities that year included creating a student advisory board and meetings with members of the Department of Education over development of a new admissions policy. In the spring of 1993 Students for Education was recognized as an official student group and the speaker was elected president. She then focused in the next year on securing funds and an office on campus for Students for Education. When a detailed budget and schedule of planned events was submitted, the speaker reports that they received immediate approval for funding. An account of an official meeting of the new chairperson of the Education Department with the group describes the announcement that all education students might not be guaranteed student teaching placements and that a fee might be instituted for student teaching assignments. The paper closes with a description of follow-up activities of the speaker and her group to address these concerns. (JB)

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STUDENTS FOR EDUCATION

Tara M. Spor

Please note: This was a speech given at NCTE, therefore, words are in all capital letters. Conversational phrases used during the conference were deleted for easier reading.

NCTE SPEECH NOVEMBER 1994 SFE AND ENGLISH

WITH THE BEGINNING OF A NEW ACADEMIC YEAR, STUDENTS FOR EDUCATION VOWED TO REMAIN AN ORGANIZATIONAL ENTITY. IN ORDER TO DO SO, OUR PRIMARY GOAL WAS TO BECOME RECOGNIZED AS AN OFFICIAL STUDENT GROUP ON CAMPUS. UNTIL THIS TIME, WE WERE A ONLY GRASS ROOTS ORGANIZATION.

AS NEWLY ELECTED SECRETARY I FOCUSED ON THE CREATION OF THE CONSTITUTION AND GAINING RECOGNITION AS AN OFFICIAL CAMPUS GROUP. MAKE NO MISTAKE, THIS WAS EASIER SAID THAN DONE. FOR THE FOLLOWING SEVEN MONTHS, I FOLLOWED, HARASSED AND HOUNDED THE OFFICERS OF STUDENT GOVERNMENT IN ORDER TO GET CONCRETE ANSWERS FOR THE ACCEPTANCE OF OUR ORGANIZATION.

AT THIS TIME I WAS ALSO FUNCTIONING ON A NEWLY CREATED EVENTS COMMITTEE. AS A STUDENT ORGANIZATION WE WISHED TO BROADEN OUR SCOPE. WE INTENDED TO ORGANIZE SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES ACROSS THE CAMPUS AS WELL AS IN THE CITY OF CAMDEN.

WHILE WE REACHED OUT FOR NEW EXPERIENCES, WE WERE STILL IN DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT. WE RECOGNIZED THAT STUDENTS WERE STILL CONFUSED AND UNSURE OF THEIR FUTURES WITHIN THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT. WE ALSO NEEDED TO INSURE THE FUTURE FOR PROSPECTIVE EDUCATION STUDENTS. AT THIS TIME, IN CONJUNCTION, WITH THE DEPARTMENT, WE CREATED A STUDENT ADVISORY BOARD. WE SELECTED TWO OF OUR MEMBERS TO MEET WITH THE DEPARTMENT AND ENGAGE IN DEPARTMENTAL MEETINGS AND DISCUSSIONS. AS REPRESENTATIVES OF THE EDUCATION STUDENT BODY, THEY HELPED TO CREATE THE NEW ADMISSION POLICY FOR THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT.

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THIS POLICY ENCOURAGED EARLY EXPERIENCE WITHIN THE CLASSROOM AND LIMITED THE AMOUNT OF STUDENTS ACCEPTED INTO THE PROGRAM IN ORDER TO AVOID THE SHORTAGE OF OBSERVERS IN THE FUTURE.

STUDENTS FOR EDUCATION WAS RECOGNIZED AS AN OFFICIAL ORGANIZATION ON MONDAY APRIL 14, 1993. THAT SPRING I WAS ELECTED PRESIDENT.

THE 1994-95 SCHOOL YEAR HAS BEEN HECTIC FOR STUDENTS FOR EDUCATION. MY STARTING GOALS FOR THIS YEAR WERE TO RECEIVE STUDENT FUNDS FOR OUR ORGANIZATION AND TO SECURE AN OFFICE ON CAMPUS. OUR BUDGET WAS A DETAILED REPORT OF THE MONEY WE NEEDED TO SUPPORT OUR CALENDAR OF EVENTS. SO WITH LOFTY GOALS AND SOME ADMITTED NAIVETÉ, I CREATED AN ACCOUNT OF MY ILLUSTRIOUS PLANS. I SPECIFIED SPEAKERS, SOCIALS, FUND-RAISERS, T-SHIRTS EXPENDITURES, AND SUPPLY NEEDS IN GREAT DETAIL. I LEFT NOTHING OUT. WE RECEIVED IMMEDIATE APPROVAL.

ATTAINMENT OF AN ON-CAMPUS OFFICE WAS MUCH MORE DIFFICULT. THE CAMPUS CENTER AT RUTGERS HAS A SINGLE FLOOR DEVOTED TO STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS FOR OFFICE SPACE. MIDWAY THROUGH THE SEMESTER I MANAGED TO OBTAIN OFFICE SPACE.

OTHER THAN THESE SIMPLE FRUSTRATIONS, THE SEMESTER WAS LOOKING BRIGHT. STUDENT TEACHERS WERE IN THE FIELD. NEW STUDENTS WERE TAKING EDUCATION CLASSES, AND SFE IS IN FOR A SATISFYING SEMESTER. BEING PRESIDENT, I WANTED TO START THE NEW YEAR OFF RIGHT. I DECIDED TO INVITE DR. STEPHEN DARIAN, THE NEW CHAIRPERSON OF THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT TO OUR FIRST OFFICIAL MEETING. THIS WOULD BE A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO INTRODUCE HIM TO THE NEW STUDENTS AND ALSO TO REMIND THE STUDENTS THAT THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT HAS AN OPEN-DOOR POLICY.

DR. DARIAN EAGERLY ACCEPTED MY INVITATION AND EXPRESSED HIS INTEREST IN MEETING THE STUDENTS. GREAT!!! I AM ON A ROLL. THIS PRESIDENT

THING ISN'T SO TOUGH. OUR FIRST MEETING AND I ALREADY HAVE A SPEAKER ; A LOFTY CALENDAR AND A BUDGET TO START US OFF. I PRANCED INTO THE FIRST MEETING, INTRODUCED DR. DARIAN AND EASILY SET MYSELF ON THE SIDE TO CASUALLY LISTEN TO THE WORDS OF GREETING...HOW THE NEW SEMESTER IS HERE...HOW WE WILL KEEP COMMUNICATION OPEN...EVERYTHING IS GONNA BE all right... AND OF COURSE THAT IS WHAT I HEARD ?

ABSOLUTELY... NOT!!!

INSTEAD I HEARD STUDENT TEACHING IS NOT GUARANTEED, AGAIN. THIS WAS SETTLED A YEAR AGO. RIGHT? WRONG. HE SPEAKS ABOUT NEEDING TO EXPAND AND WATCH OUR RESOURCES. HE SPEAKS OF PROPOSING A FEE FOR STUDENT TEACHING. ACCORDING TO DR. DARIAN, HE COULD NOT GUARANTEE THAT ALL STUDENTS WOULD STUDENT TEACH WITHOUT THE INITIATION OF A FEE WHICH WOULD BE PAID TO THE OBSERVERS. SO HERE WE GO AGAIN. A NEW FIGHT , A NEW FURY AND A NEW ENEMY. LET ME MAKE IT CLEAR, THAT SFE IS NOT JUST PICKING A FIGHT, THE LAST THING WE WANT TO DO IS WAGE A NEW WAR. I WILL ADMIT THE BACKLASH WAS CALM FOR OUR ORGANIZATION. I THINK WE WERE MORE IN A STATE OF SHOCK RATHER THAN ANYTHING ELSE. OK SO LET THIS SINK IN- WE HAD AN AGREEMENT AND A NEW POLICY...AND NOW THAT'S NOT GOOD ENOUGH? WE DIDN'T EVEN GIVE IT A CHANCE.

I SPENT THE NEXT TWO WEEKS, MEETING WITH DR. DARIAN; GETTING HIS FEEDBACK, TRYING TO PINPOINT SPECIFIC ANSWERS. EACH TIME I WENT, I GOT A NEW ANSWER. WE THEN DECIDED TO SPREAD THE WORD TO THE EDUCATION STUDENTS ABOUT THE INTENDED FEE AND INVITED DR. DARIAN BACK AGAIN , TO PROVIDE PERHAPS A BETTER EXPLANATIONS.

OUR SECOND MEETING WITH DR. DARIAN WAS MORE SEVERE THAN THE FIRST. WE HAD TIME TO MULL IT OVER AND THE STUDENTS CAME BACK WITH A RESOUNDING NO! STUDENTS ARGUED FOR PETITIONS AND LETTERS TO BE WRITTEN. CALL THE DEAN, CALL THE PRESS. NOW, KEEP IN MIND THAT MANY OF THESE STUDENTS WERE

NEW AND UNFAMILIAR WITH THE CHAIN OF COMMAND. SO NOW HISTORY BEGINS TO REPEAT ITSELF. A THREAT IS MADE; STUDENTS REVOLT...WHAT WILL BE THE OUTCOME? WE SUCCEEDED IN THE PAST AND I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT WE WILL SUCCEED AGAIN. WELL MAYBE A LITTLE DOUBT...WE DO HAVE NEW MEMBERS WHO ARE UNFAMILIAR WITH OUR HISTORY. AND AS A RESULT OF OUR PREVIOUS SUCCESS, A LOT OF OUR OLD MEMBERS HAVE SINCE GRADUATED, BUT WE WILL CONTINUE TO FIGHT. IF IT IS PERSONAL PEOPLE WILL RESPOND.

SO NOW I'M LEADING THE CHARGE. AND I KEEP MY PREVIOUS EXPERIENCES WITH ME FOR REFERENCE. IN THE MEAN TIME ,MY LIFE MOVES FORWARD. WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE? I WILL GRADUATE IN MAY WITH MY DEGREE IN ENGLISH. AND IN SEPTEMBER I WILL BEGIN MY STUDENT TEACHING (HOPEFULLY) AND BEGIN TO POUND THE PAVEMENT IN DECEMBER.

BUT I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT TEACHING IS ALL I HAVE AHEAD OF ME. I PLAN ON GOING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL AND STUDY EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION. BUT SOMETIME BETWEEN RECEIVING MY CERTIFICATION AND BECOMING AN ADMINISTRATOR, I NEED TO TEACH. SO IF ANY OF YOU COULD SWING A JOB MY WAY....THE LEAST I COULD DO WOULD BE TO ORGANIZE YOUR FIGHTS.

BUT SERIOUSLY, I AM NOT HERE TO PLEAD MY CAUSE TO YOU NOR TO EXTOL THE GREATNESS OF MY ORGANIZATION, WELL MAYBE I AM JUST A LITTLE BIT. BUT I AM HERE TO MAKE CLEAR WHAT WE AS AN ORGANIZED ENTITY HAVE ACCOMPLISHED AND WHAT WE WILL CONTINUE TO DO. I BELIEVE THE ACTIVISM IN WHICH WE HAVE ENGAGED HAS BROUGHT ABOUT MANY CHANGES WITHIN OUR EDUCATIONAL DEPARTMENT AS WELL AS HOW THE ADMINISTRATION VIEWS ITS STUDENTS. CAN THIS NOT BE APPLIED TO YOUR STUDENTS AND ADMINISTRATORS AS WELL?

AT A COMMUTER-CAMPUS LIKE RUTGERS-CAMDEN, WE MADE OUR VOICES HEARD. AND FOR ONCE THE EDUCATION STUDENTS HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO SAY:

WE ARE HERE, WE ARE IMPORTANT AND WE DESERVE TO BE HEARD. AND YOU, YOUR COLLEAGUES AND YOUR STUDENTS DESERVE TO BE HEARD.

I KNOW THAT I WILL TAKE THIS VIEW WITH ME INTO MY CAREER AS A TEACHER. IN THE TEACHING PROFESSION REGARDLESS OF THE LEVEL IN WHICH YOU PARTICIPATE, THERE WILL ALWAYS BE A BUREAUCRACY WITH WHICH TO CONTEND. WILL I AS A TEACHER STAND BY AND ALLOW SOMETHING WITH WHICH I DISAGREE GO UNCONTESTED OR EVEN UNQUESTIONED? ABSOLUTELY NOT! BUT THE QUESTION IS...WILL YOU?

I AM NOT SAYING THAT YOU SHOULD FIGHT SOMETHING JUST TO FIGHT IT. A VICTORY IS NOT GUARANTEED WITH EVERY BATTLE. BUT TODAY'S TEACHING ENVIRONMENT IS SURROUNDED BY POLITICAL ELECTRICITY. POLITICS SURROUNDS EVERY DECISION THAT IS MADE FROM THE ABOLISHMENT OF THE OFFICE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN NEW JERSEY TO THE BANNING OF HOMEWORK IN CALIFORNIA. I URGE YOU TODAY TO TAKE A STAND WHEN YOU ARE CALLED TO DO SO. IF WE WISH TO CREATE FUTURE LEADERS, WE NEED TO START BY BEING LEADERS OURSELVES, TODAY.

THANK YOU